

Vital Signs



Cardiac Detour

One couple, one week,
two heart procedures

Vital Signs

Vital Signs

is a publication of Kaweah Health.

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

I'm honored to write to you as Kaweah Health's Chief Executive Officer. As I step into this role, I'm grateful for the trust placed in me by our Board of Directors and inspired by the work happening every day across our organization.

Many of you already know me from my work as Kaweah Health's Chief Strategy Officer since 2018. During that time, I've witnessed firsthand the fantastic care we provide to our patients throughout Tulare and Kings counties. I'm proud of our legacy and accomplishments as we continue building on the strong foundation established by Gary Herbst and the dedicated professionals who have shaped Kaweah Health.

During the CEO recruitment process, I was often asked about my vision for Kaweah Health. People wanted to know how we could succeed in an increasingly difficult environment. My answer was then, and remains now, that if Kaweah Health commits to fulfilling our mission statement we will not only survive these turbulent times, but we will thrive.

Kaweah Health adopted the current mission statement in 2018: Health is our Passion. Excellence is our focus. Compassion is our promise. These 12 words explain why Kaweah Health exists, but they also describe the keys to our success.

Health is our Passion. Our organization exists to improve the health of the community we serve. We do not have shareholders to generate financial returns for. We do not have a corporate office out of state. We are a public organization committed to improving health — not just healthcare — for our friends, neighbors, and family. Every one of our 5,300 employees and nearly 700 medical staff members contribute to improving health. Whether they work directly in patient care, or whether they work a little more behind the scenes, everyone plays an important part in caring for our community. This is a responsibility that we do not take lightly. In fact, it is our passion. The word passion means an intense feeling, a strong affection, or a desire. It is with this level of intensity that we must strive to serve our patients.

Excellence is our Focus. The great football coach Vince Lombardi said, "Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence." No one is perfect, including Kaweah Health. But perfection must be our aim. In everything we do, we must strive to do it better tomorrow than we did it today. We must constantly seek to improve upon everything that we do — from patient care, to the way we answer the phone and greet patients, to the cleanliness of our facilities, the accuracy of our patient bills, and everything in between. We owe this to our patients and our community.

Compassion is our Promise. Perhaps above all else, Kaweah Health promises to treat everyone we serve with compassion. Patients often come to us injured, sick, and scared. It is our duty to treat them with sympathy and concern. We must be driven to ease the suffering of our patients and their families. Sometimes small actions — a kind word, a gentle touch, or a warm blanket — can have a profound impact on someone in need. We promise this to our patients.

As I begin my new role and Kaweah Health looks to its future, my challenge to our teams and my promise to our community is to live up to the standards outlined in our mission statement. By doing so, we ensure better health for our community and a strong and secure future for Kaweah Health.

I close with the same commitment to openness and transparency that Kaweah Health has demonstrated over the last several years. When you see me in the community, I welcome any questions or feedback. I also encourage anyone interested in taking an active role in your local health system to join one of our many community advisory committees. These groups meet with Kaweah Health leaders, staff, and physicians monthly to discuss important issues and to provide us with direct feedback. You can learn more at KaweahHealth.org/CAC.

Thank you for your continued trust in Kaweah Health.



Marc Mertz

Chief Executive Officer of Kaweah Health

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Rooted in Care

Kaveah Health's new CEO combines strategic vision with hands-on dedication to community and compassion.

Left: Kaveah Health CEO Marc Mertz smiles at his daughter while fixing the fence on his property.

Right: Mertz with one of his Randall bulls. His herd is one of few keeping the rare breed from Colonial times in existence.

“As a consultant, I’d develop strategy and new ideas, then leave,” Mertz says. “Here, I get to see it through execution and witness the benefits for the organization and community. That’s extremely rewarding.”

He didn’t just put down roots at Kaveah Health — he put them in the soil too, becoming a gentleman rancher. More important than the house purchase was the 22 acres that came with it. When Mertz isn’t working at his hospital job, he and his wife, Melissa, are taking care of their array of cattle, ponies, donkeys, and horses.

He spends most of his time at home in cowboy boots and jeans, fixing fences, feeding animals, and watching his 13-year-old daughter, Ellie, ride her horse.

“I spent most of my life living at or near the beach,” says Mertz, who grew up in Philadelphia, Connecticut, and Virginia. “But my wife and I decided that we really wanted to live in the mountains and we have both always loved animals, so it just sort of worked out.”



Professional Background

Marc Mertz, Kaveah Health’s new CEO, has been with the organization for seven years and brings more than 20 years of healthcare leadership.

Education

- Bachelor’s in Health Services Administration, James Madison University
- Master’s of Health Administration, University of Southern California

Previous Positions

- Chief strategy officer, Kaveah Health
- Vice president and physician services practice leader at GE Healthcare (formerly The Camden Group) in El Segundo, CA
- President of Health Check Incorporated in Mexico Beach, FL
- Vice president of The Horizon Group in Virginia Beach, VA

Certifications

- Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives (FACHE)

Community Affiliations

- Rotary Club of Visalia, immediate past president
- Visalia Chamber of Commerce, board member
- Mineral King Preservation Society, board member
- Riata Ranch International, board member

When Marc Mertz came to Kaveah Health the first time in 2017, he already had a job in Southern California as a hospital consultant. But he had fallen in love with Three Rivers and the surrounding community, so he decided to see what the local hospital had to offer.

“I had colleagues who told me Kaveah Health is this independent health

system with a great culture and great leaders that gets things done,” Mertz says. “After my wife and I bought our house in Three Rivers, I reached out and said: ‘Here’s what I’ve done in healthcare; I’m going to be in the area; maybe I could help out.’”

For nine months, Mertz would stop by and talk with then-Chief Executive Officer Gary Herbst about what the

organization needed and how he could help. Ultimately, the job of chief strategy officer was created for Mertz to fill in July 2018.

On Dec. 22, 2025, he became Kaveah Health’s fifth CEO.

“We are excited for Marc to step into the position of CEO, bringing not only more than 20 years of experience outside

our organization, but also a deep knowledge and understanding of Kaveah Health and our unique challenges,” then Kaveah Health Board President Mike Olmos says. “Marc is the right person to guide Kaveah Health through the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.”

Building Roots

Back in 2018, after a consulting career spent on the road, often flying across the country weekly, Mertz was ready to put down roots.



Outside of the hospital, Mertz can be found in blue jeans and cowboy boots taking care of his animals, which are mostly rescues, and spending time with his wife, Melissa, and daughter, Ellie.



His dedication to taking care of things on the farm is also evident in his healthcare work, where taking care of patients is his top priority.

“The most inspiring part of my job is when I hear stories about the fantastic care we provide to patients,” Mertz says. “That’s what it’s all about.”

And Mertz knows that world-class care starts with compassionate people. His eagerness to work directly with employees reflects his belief that an engaged, supported team is the foundation of quality healthcare.

Expanding Access

To ensure Kaweah Health continues improving care, Mertz is focused on bringing more physicians to the area.

“We know significant numbers of our local community leave Visalia and Tulare County to get care,” he says. “Part of that is access to care. We don’t have enough physicians, so we’re committed to recruiting the physicians we need to keep care local.”

Mertz was instrumental in establishing the new Kaweah Health Medical Clinic Akers location to provide office space

for new doctors. Previously, there has not been enough medical office space to help attract new physicians to the area.

“Being an underserved community, there’s a lot of opportunity for a physician who wants to come here and have a very robust and busy practice,” Mertz says. “It can be a challenging community to recruit into, but that changes once people get to know it.”

A key specialty Kaweah Health is aggressively recruiting is OB-GYNs, which are in shortage not just in Tulare

County, but throughout the state and the country. With the recent decrease in OB-GYNs in the area, there has been a critical gap in care for women.

“As the leading hospital for births in the area, we deliver more than 4,000 babies each year,” Mertz says. “We need to provide better access so new moms can get that prenatal care before receiving OB services at the hospital.”

Beyond recruiting new physicians, Mertz sees strengthening relationships with the physicians already in the community as another way to improve

and grow. He was given a unanimous vote of confidence from the hospital’s medical staff before he was chosen as CEO.

“Both the hospital and physician groups are trying to add services to this community that don’t exist today so patients can stay local for their health care,” Mertz says. “We both want to improve the quality of care and the patient experience and reduce the length of stay that patients have in the hospital. Those are things that require a partnership between Kaweah Health and the physicians.”

A Compassionate Approach

That same spirit of care and partnership extends beyond the hospital to Mertz’s personal life and the uniqueness of his ranch. Most of his animals are rescues of some kind.

His wife, Melissa, a nurse practitioner with her own practice in Three Rivers, loves all animals and rescues every one she can, most recently a desert tortoise.

“Any time she finds an animal in need, whether it is on the side of the road or



After spending most of his life near the beach, Mertz has found comfort in becoming a gentleman rancher.

in a bad situation, she will step in to help,” Mertz says.

Their cattle are a sort of rescue, too. Mertz raises Randall cattle — a rare breed of purebred cattle developed in Sunderland, VT during Colonial times. Thought to be extinct until one ranch in Vermont was discovered to have an isolated herd, there are only about 300 to 500 Randall cattle left.

“We love the idea of helping to continue the breed,” Mertz says.

It’s that instinct to preserve and nurture — whether rare cattle or community health — that defines Mertz’s approach to leadership.

“My main goal is for Kaweah Health to be an organization known for excellence but also compassion,” Mertz says. “Imagine how the delivery of

healthcare would improve if every interaction we had with patients, providers, and each other, was grounded in compassion. Not only does compassion improve our experiences, but compassionate care can measurably improve physical and psychological outcomes.” **KH**



Dr. Hammond discusses patient care with Cardiovascular Charge Nurse Diana Castro-Gutierrez.

Tomorrow's Medicine

Dr. Terese Hammond is bringing clinical research to Kaweah Health.

Kaweah Health is bringing a new aspect to care in our community by integrating clinical research into everyday practice. Clinical research, often associated with major academic medical centers, is a careful, time-intensive process that ensures new medications, therapies, and technologies are safe and effective before reaching the public.

When a drug or therapy receives FDA clearance, it has gone through many years of research, trials, and validation. This pathway takes on average 10 years and includes several phases of clinical trials. Early phase 1 trials focus on safety, while phase 2 studies treat patients in a randomized and controlled way to compare new therapies to the current standard of care. Later, larger trials confirm results and monitor side effects. Academic institutions may conduct these trials for decades, contributing to breakthroughs that shape the future of medicine.

Kaweah Health is currently engaged in such vital work under the leadership of Program Director of Pulmonary and Critical Care Terese Hammond,

MD. Her leadership is helping bring research opportunities, similar to those at University of California, Los Angeles and University of Southern California, to Visalia.

“What excites me most,” Dr. Hammond shares, “is that research allows the best of Kaweah to come together with one vision and one goal: to make sure the care you receive here is the same as what you’d find at a major institution.”

For Dr. Hammond, this work is deeply personal. “One of the worst feelings a doctor can have is telling a patient there is nothing else we can offer,” she says. “By bringing clinical research to our community, we now have more to offer, especially for patients who have reached the limits of standard treatments.”

These opportunities also bring hope for the future. “Offering research as a therapeutic option allows more people to get treatments that weren’t available before,” she says. “It brings a higher level of care to Visalia and expands the variety of providers, specialists, and world-class physicians who come

here to work with our patients. We are expanding our catchment area and bringing world-class care to you. The ability to access new therapies at Kaweah Health not only gives promise and options to our patients, but can yield important information that helps other patients facing similar diseases and illnesses.”

Today, patients may have access to clinical trials that offer additional options beyond traditional standard of care. Participation is always voluntary, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kaweah Health closely monitors investigational treatments to ensure patients and their families have all the information needed to provide informed consent. These studies can open the door to promising therapies not yet widely available.

Kaweah Health remains committed to providing advanced care close to home, ensuring patients and families can receive the latest developments in medicine in the community they trust.

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Called at Birth

Kaweah Health nurse's prediction shaped Dylan Lee's journey to Major League Baseball.



Left: Labor and delivery nurse Kim Hofer, RN, holds the large baby footprints of Atlanta Braves pitcher Dylan Lee. Above: Kim, Dylan's wife Courtney, Dylan and his son, Walker, and Dylan's parents Elza and John Lee.



Kaweah Health has been recognized as a High Performing Maternity Care Hospital in the 2026 U.S. News & World Report rankings.

Atlanta Braves pitcher Dylan Lee had always been told he was going to be an athlete. It wasn't his parents who made that initial declaration — it was the Kaweah Health nurse who helped deliver him 31 years ago.

Labor and delivery nurse Kim Hofer, RN, says she doesn't always make predictions about the babies she delivers,

but something about Dylan's large feet caught her attention.

"I was the first person to meet him, kind of, and he has done well in his life," Hofer says. "It makes me feel good that I'm able to be a part of that even in a distant way."

Dylan wanted to meet the nurse who declared "he's going to be an athlete

one day" because he's been hearing that story since he was 5 years old.

"You don't know the impact you can have on someone's life," Dylan told Kim when they were reunited recently. "I just wanted you to know that what you said really had an impact on my life."

Dylan grew up playing many sports, but focused on baseball at a young

age, playing Little League in both Dinuba and Orsi simultaneously. He went on to play for Dinuba High School, College of the Sequoias, and California State University, Fresno before being drafted into the big leagues in 2016. He joined the Braves in 2021, the year they won the World Series.

Dylan is the first baby to return and visit Kim, who has worked at Kaweah Health for 35 years and helped deliver thousands of babies.

"I was surprised, I didn't think any baby I helped deliver would ever reach out to me," she says.

Dylan was just happy Kim still worked at Kaweah Health.

"That says a lot about her and a lot about the hospital to have that kind of longevity," Dylan says. **KH**



Cardiac Detour

One couple, one week, two heart procedures

Gary and Naomi Faucett never imagined their eight-month RV adventure across Canada and the eastern United States would end the way it did. Their story is a testament to vigilance, expert medical care, and the resilience of a devoted couple.

Warning Signs

During their trip of a lifetime, Gary noticed feeling some chest palpitations and fatigue for the first time. The former avid cyclist started getting so exhausted, he gave up biking, figuring it was just a part of aging. Naomi started to notice a difference in Gary too — he was shuffling his feet, speaking with a weaker voice, and sweating profusely

after just 15 minutes of a simple activity like watering plants in the yard.

When they returned home, Gary visited a cardiologist and while his EKG looked normal, further testing was ordered. Meanwhile, Naomi — who had been quietly experiencing jaw pain during the trip — decided it was time for her own checkup.

Code Blue

Naomi's EKG results from her checkup were immediately concerning. Combined with her jaw pain, her doctor said she must go to the hospital for an angiogram, a special X-ray test to look at your arteries and veins, that

week. Gary, waiting in the car, had no idea about her symptoms until he was called inside.

On the morning of her angiogram, Naomi's jaw pain returned intensely. Gary rushed her to the emergency department, where she was transferred to surgery for an emergency angioplasty. Minutes later when the intercom announced, "Code Blue" (a critical emergency alert) Gary, a retired paramedic, knew instantly, it was Naomi.

Naomi had gone into cardiac arrest during the angioplasty and required four cardioversions (controlled electrical shocks to reset an irregular or



Gary and Naomi Faucett took a trip across Canada in their RV. When they returned home, both had unplanned heart procedures in the same week.



pain. I was certain I was dying," he remembers. The team rushed him to emergency surgery. He woke with four new bypass grafts while his wife was recovering on a different floor.

Two Hearts, One Hospital

The surreal reality of both spouses hospitalized for major heart surgery brought unexpected challenges.

Naomi's greatest distress was being unable to sit at Gary's bedside — something she had always done. Dr. Bansal arranged for the Faucett's son to video call from Gary's room so Naomi could pray with him before surgery.

rapid heart rhythm) to revive her. When she woke up, she was in the ICU (intensive care unit). "I was shocked at how fast everything had happened," says Naomi. "One of my nurses told me I was 'one tough cookie' who had 'fought for everything' while the team worked to save my life." Naomi still needed a bypass surgery, which was scheduled for the upcoming Monday.

Gary's Turn

The next day, as Naomi recovered in the ICU, Gary continued a series of tests used to check the heart's electrical activity, structure, and blood flow, called a cardiac workup. He completed a treadmill stress test — and failed it,

so he was scheduled for an angiogram the next day. When Gary woke up, he received serious news from his care team — he had severe, four-vessel coronary artery disease requiring a quadruple bypass. Gary recalls not grasping the seriousness of his condition. "I told them I would just head home and come back Monday for the surgery, but cardiothoracic surgeon Shelly Bansal, MD, told him, "Gary, you don't understand. We are checking you in immediately. We need to keep a close eye on you."

The next day, intense chest pain gripped Gary. "I was curled in a fetal position, clutching my chest in horrible

The staff worked to keep them connected. When both were stable, they were placed side by side, pillows together — two recovering patients who had spent decades as each other's caregivers.

Exceptional Care

Gary and Naomi have a profound gratitude for the Kaweah Health cardiac team that cared for them. "They got to know us as people, not just as patients," Naomi says. "They were very encouraging and told us we would get better and be able to do things again." Gary recalls the compassion they showed throughout recovery, "If you rang the bell, they were right there. And I'll just never forget that. I'll never forget their names, ever. They'll be a part of our lives. I love those ladies and men."

— “ —

We're here because of the care at Kaweah Health — from the surgery teams to cardiac rehab, they gave us our lives back. Now we're planning our next road trip.

— ” —

— Gary and Naomi Faucett on their heart surgery experience

Learn more about Kaweah Health's cardiac services at KaweahHealth.org/Heart.



Road to Recovery

Going home proved humbling. Simple tasks suddenly required assistance. Their sons, daughters-in-law, and a grand-daughter flew in to help. When family left, they hired Kaweah Health Home Care for support. A home health team visited several times weekly, teaching them how to move safely and handle daily tasks without straining their incisions.

A 12-week cardiac rehab program at Kaweah Health Cardiac Rehabilitation Clinic became Gary and Naomi's bridge from surgical patients to active individuals. The clinic staff knew each patient's medical history — including Gary's cardiac history and Naomi's preexisting mobility challenges — and tailored exercises accordingly, pushing them without ignoring real limitations.

Today, Gary and Naomi offer straightforward advice: reach out and get help, don't ignore symptoms, and if cardiac rehab is recommended, commit to it.

Above: Gary and Naomi worked with occupational therapist Antonio Valdez and registered nurse Jessica Aguirre, who visited them at home during their recoveries.

Below: Gary and Naomi are ready to get back on the road after recovery from their heart procedures.



“There's life after heart surgery,” Naomi emphasizes. They are already planning to get back into their trailer for more trips next year — two hearts, both repaired, moving forward together.

KH



Welcome
Dr. Shelly Bansal
Board-Certified
Cardiothoracic Surgeon

When it comes to heart care, we bring more to the table.

Cardiology

With nearly three decades as leaders in heart care, our board-certified cardiology team delivers comprehensive cardiovascular services — from routine monitoring to advanced procedures including WATCHMAN™, TAVR, electrophysiology, and interventional cardiology in the Central Valley.

Cardiothoracic Surgery

Our nationally recognized program has performed thousands of successful open-heart and thoracic surgeries. We offer minimally invasive options and partner with Cleveland Clinic to deliver the highest standard of surgical care for our community.

Cardiac Rehabilitation

Our American Association certified program provides supervised sessions led by registered nurses and exercise physiologists. Each personalized plan is designed to improve your endurance, manage stress, and support both your recovery and long-term heart health.

Cardiac Diagnostic Center

Our diagnostic center provides comprehensive cardiac and vascular ultrasound imaging through highly-trained, registered sonographers using state-of-the-art technology. Our compassionate team works with you to ensure accurate heart assessment and early detection, close to home and family.



To learn more about Dr. Shelly Bansal, visit KaweahHealth.org/LearnAboutHeart.



In affiliation with



A Heart for Patients

Tulare Cardiology Center is helping patients reclaim their quality of life.



This page: Dr. Sarmad Said makes sure his patients have all the information they need and are actively involved in their care.

Opposite page: Andrew Newsom is one of Dr. Said's many success stories.

The first time Daniel Kelly met Sarmad Said, MD from the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center in Tulare, Daniel was in the hospital with a concussion. A nurse was helping him walk when Dr. Said spotted Daniel's heart monitor at the nurse's station and told the team to get him back in bed — he was going into atrial fibrillation (AFib), a heart problem where the upper chambers of the heart beat fast and irregularly.

Dr. Said wasn't Daniel's doctor yet, but after that catch, Daniel's response was simple: "You are now," and he transferred his care on the spot.

Since then, Daniel has faced some serious health concerns and big decisions, but the team at Tulare Cardiology Center has guided him through each step. Most recently, Dr. Said discovered Daniel's heart valve wasn't opening wide enough and recommended surgery; he gave Daniel three options:

UCSF, Fresno, or Visalia. Daniel asked, "If I was your father, where would you send me?"

Dr. Said did not hesitate, "Stay here in Visalia. Harleen Chahil, MD can do your surgery here at Kaweah Health."

Daniel followed this advice, and Dr. Chahil installed an artificial heart valve called a TAVR valve, leaving Daniel feeling better and with more energy right away.

"Dr. Said talks to me in words I can understand and just says it like it is, without ever talking over my head," Daniel says. "I feel completely confident with him and everyone at the clinic takes very good care of me. I actually love going to the clinic."

Comprehensive Care Close to Home
Kaweah Health Cardiology Center in Tulare doesn't just treat hearts — the team sees the whole patient. Led by

board-certified cardiologist Dr. Said, who brings advanced training in nuclear medicine, echocardiography, and cardiac CT, the clinic delivers high-level technical expertise to Tulare and Kings counties. The team there is known for taking the time to understand each patient's unique circumstances and crafting treatment plans that actually fit their lives.

"I try to meet my patients where they are," Dr. Said explains. "I want to actively involve them in the discussion and see what they know about their health. By the time they leave here, they are fully informed — not only about what's going on now, but about the choices we're making and the plan going forward."

A Personal Touch That Matters

The team at Kaweah Health Cardiology Center emphasizes their commitment to supporting patients through every stage of their care journey.

"Cardiology and healthcare can be challenging for patients," Dr. Said says. "We do our best to accommodate the needs of patients, no matter what they are. I would like to reiterate that we're available for our patients to provide personal support. We really pride ourselves on that personal touch with our patients. We are always available by phone or email to answer their questions and address any concerns."

Andrew Newsom experienced this personal touch firsthand, when he visited Dr. Said after his heart function dropped to just 25 percent.



At only 29 years old, Andrew was experiencing retention and fatigue, symptoms he initially attributed to COVID-19.

"I really thought it was just Covid because I was so tired. But when I started retaining water a lot of water in my legs, I knew it was serious," says Andrew. As Andrew would soon learn, his condition was far more severe — he was facing heart failure, something that ran in his family.

Andrew was referred to the Kaweah Health Cardiology Center, where Dr. Said quickly recognized the severity of his condition and scheduled a left heart catheterization with coronary angiography. When the procedure was first scheduled, Andrew didn't go through with

it — he was very scared of the unknown and worried because heart failure was part of his family history. It took a lot of time, family support, and multiple conversations with Dr. Said and his staff to finally convince him to do it.

"I was really scared, but Dr. Said and everyone there really helped me be brave and go through with it," Andrew recalls. "I'm so grateful they didn't give up on me — they literally saved my life."

— “

I was really scared, but Dr. Said and everyone on his staff helped me be brave. I'm so grateful they didn't give up on me — they literally saved my life.

— ”

— Andrew Newsom on his heart care journey

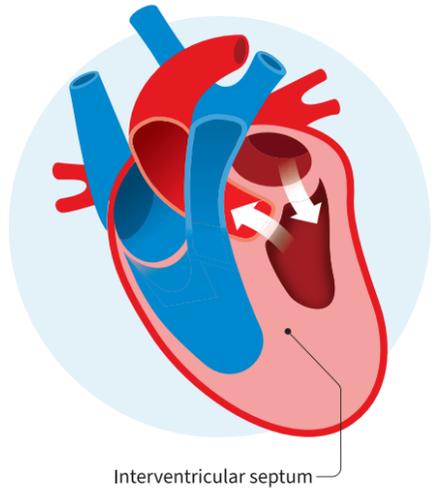
Today, Andrew's heart function has improved from 25 percent to 52 percent. With the procedure completed and ongoing medication, he has successfully managed his heart failure and is very relieved to be alive.

For those living with heart failure or other cardiac conditions, having access to high-quality care close to home can make all the difference. The team at Kaweah Health Cardiology Center is dedicated to helping patients not just survive their diagnosis, but thrive. 

Learn more about Kaweah Health's cardiac services at [KawahHealth.org/Heart](https://www.kawahhealth.org/Heart).

What is Heart Failure?

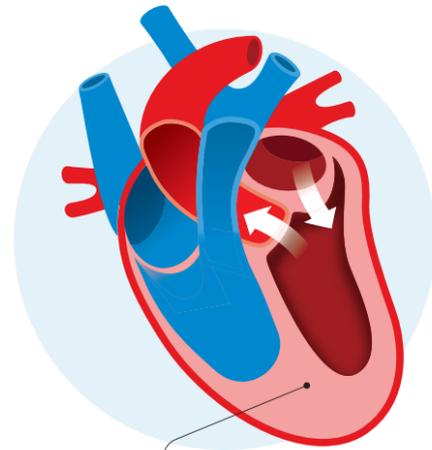
Heart failure occurs when the heart cannot pump enough blood for the body to function well — either because the muscle becomes too weak, too stiff, or develops a structural problem. While this diagnosis can sound frightening and is typically a long-term condition, the reality is more hopeful than ever: with early diagnosis, the right care team, and modern treatment techniques, many people can slow the disease’s progression, feel significantly better, and enjoy more active, fulfilling lives.



Interventricular septum

Normal heart

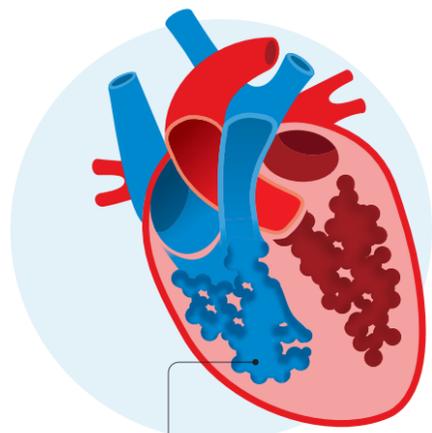
A normal heart is a muscular pump divided into four chambers—two upper chambers (atria) and two lower chambers (ventricles)—separated by the interventricular septum, which is the wall that divides the left and right sides of the heart. The heart muscle has a smooth, consistent thickness that allows it to contract powerfully and relax fully with each beat. Blood flows efficiently through the chambers in one direction, and the muscle remains strong and flexible enough to meet the body’s changing demands for oxygen-rich blood throughout the day.



Ventricular dilation
Muscle fibers have stretched

Nonischemic cardiomyopathy

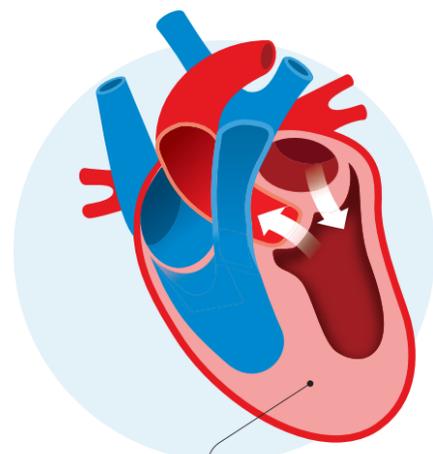
Nonischemic cardiomyopathy is where the heart muscle weakens for reasons unrelated to blocked arteries. Many patients are diagnosed later in their illness which means their conditions are often more advanced by the time they get treatment.



Spongy, irregular muscular trabeculations

Noncompaction cardiomyopathy

Noncompaction cardiomyopathy is when the inside of the heart develops extra ridges and deep spaces, affecting how forcefully the heart contracts.



Excessive wall thickening
of cardiac muscle

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is where the heart muscle becomes abnormally thick. The thickened muscle can restrict blood flow or trigger irregular heartbeats.



Infused Care

Patient Jacqueline Cardoza has found a family at the Kaweah Health Infusion Center.



L – R: Patricia Lira, RN, Rhonda Evans, Intake and Billing Coordinator, Leticia Valdez, RN, Julissa Sanchez, RN, Sabrina Pena, Intake and Billing Coordinator, Martha Cantu, RN, Miguel Sanchez, Nurse Manager (not pictured, Margarita Benitez-Baeza, Patient Access Specialist)

Born in Long Beach and raised in Southern California, Jacqueline Cardoza came to Visalia to be closer to family, but in 2007, she felt a lump on her neck.

After a biopsy and referral to an oncologist, it was determined she had non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. It took her six rounds of chemotherapy and two infusions of RITUXAN for her cancer to go into remission. She went back to living her life but for years after, she kept experiencing sinus problems and getting colds, and eventually had to be hospitalized due to a serious sinus infection.

A blood draw showed her cancer treatments had taken away her IgA and IgG, the antibodies that help protect her from infection. Jacqueline would now need infusions every six weeks to support her immune system. Her primary care provider recommended her to the Kaweah Health Infusion Center, at the corner of Mineral King Avenue and Willis Street in downtown

Visalia, as it was near her home and she had already been a patient for six years. She couldn’t imagine getting infusions somewhere else. “It’s like picking a Hilton hotel versus a Motel 6, and Kaweah Health’s infusion center is the Hilton. I wouldn’t want to go anywhere else.”

Kaweah Health’s Infusion Center offers a wide range of treatments, including therapies for autoimmune conditions, neurological disorders, gastrointestinal diseases, infections, and certain types of cancer. Additionally, hydration therapy, blood transfusions, iron infusions, and biologic treatments, is provided and allows patients to receive high-quality, hospital-affiliated care close to home.

The heart of our infusion services is a highly trained nursing team who bring both expertise and genuine compassion to each interaction. They monitor patients closely, explain each step of the process, and take time to answer questions in clear, easy-to-understand language. Their goal is to help patients

feel safe, informed, and cared for throughout every visit.

“They’re like my family now,” she says. “I’m a Medicare patient and a veteran, so I would be able to have a nurse come do it for me, or I can do self-injections, but I choose to go to the Infusion Center because my experience has been so great. They care about me and are truly glad to see me.”

Now retired, she and her partner enjoy travelling the world. “I want to thank my nurses Martha, Letty, and Patricia in particular,” Jacqueline says. “Part of the reason I enjoy my infusions and had such a great result is due mostly to them.”

Kaweah Health remains committed to expanding access, enhancing comfort, and strengthening the supportive experience our patients rely on. Every infusion is more than a treatment, it’s a moment of connection, hope, and healing – and at Kaweah Health, you never go through it alone. **KH**

Lighting the Way

Youth Crisis Stabilization Unit offers hope to youth and families.



Opposite, Dr. Cory D. Jaques leads the Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU), open 24/7 to all youth aged 21 and under.

Above, CSU staff write encouraging messages on the wall inside the Youth Crisis Stabilization Unit.

Below, Dr. Cory D. Jaques with CSU team members Mental Health Worker Liz Hernandez and Licensed Vocational Nurse Garrett Wilkin.



When a child experiences a mental health crisis in Tulare County, families have historically faced a difficult choice: wait hours in an emergency room not designed for psychiatric care, or watch their child be transported out of the community entirely. In December, that stark reality changed.

Kaweah Health and the Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency have opened the doors to a Youth Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) near Visalia's Oval

Park. The facility is a recognition that young people in crisis deserve specialized care, delivered with compassion, close to home.

The 12-chair unit operates around the clock, every day of the year. Its thoughtful design separates children 17 and under from transitional age youth between 18 and 21, acknowledging the different developmental needs of these age groups. Patients can arrive through the Kaweah Health Emergency

Department, direct referrals from community agencies, or simply walk through the door when crisis strikes.

Inside, trained staff provide crisis evaluation, psychiatric services, and stabilization support designed to de-escalate situations before they spiral into unmanageable emergencies. The goal isn't long-term hospitalization — it's immediate intervention that keeps young people connected to their families and community resources.

"Every aspect of care here is guided by what is right for the child and family and is rooted in evidence-based practice and ethical treatment," says Cory D. Jaques, MD, the CSU's medical director.

His team shares a core belief: every young person, regardless of background or circumstance, deserves timely access to expert mental health care.

The journey to opening day began in 2022, when Kaweah Health and Tulare County HHS secured nearly \$5 million from a California Health Facilities Financing Authority grant. Three years of planning, construction, and staffing have culminated in a facility that represents hope for families. 



Scan the QR code to hear Dr. Jaques talk about the Youth Crisis Stabilization Unit. Or visit KaweahHealth.org/CSUvideo.

Thank You

The Kaweah Health Foundation's inaugural Twinkle & Toast Christmas Tree Auction brought holiday cheer and beautiful Christmas décor to an overflow crowd of more than 250 people on Dec. 12, 2025.

Held at The Hyde in Visalia, the event raised funds for 14 Kaweah Health departments, including the Sequoia Regional Cancer Center, Emergency Department, Hospice, and more.

The generous audience helped raise nearly \$100,000 for projects to directly benefit patients, and many of the winning bidders donated their trees to local families and businesses, making the season even brighter.



A special thanks to our sponsors who made the event possible.

- Cal Bennetts All-Ways Moving**
- Educational Employees Credit Union**
- Rotary Club of Visalia**
- The Sence Foundation**
- Valley Strong Credit Union**

Save the Date!
The next Twinkle & Toast event
will be December 4, 2026
at the Wyndham Hotel, in Visalia CA.



Out and About



Light Up a Life

Kaweah Health Hospice recently hosted Light Up a Life, a special evening dedicated to remembering and honoring loved ones who have passed.

Families and friends gathered to reflect, share memories, and take part in a meaningful tradition by placing personalized ornaments on a beautifully lit tree. Each ornament served as a heartfelt tribute, honoring lives that will always be remembered.



Playground Stencil Project

Thanks to the CalFresh Healthy Living Grant, Kaweah Health's Community Outreach team partnered with the Cutler-Orosi Unified School District Early Childhood Education Program and their Parent Advisory Committee to create a brand-new playground stencil project at Golden Valley Pre-K.

These stencils brighten the space and get kids moving through fun activities inspired by the CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Children's Health) curriculum.



MOVES Program

The Kaweah Health Community Outreach team, in collaboration with Radio Lazer, visited Four J Farms & Jerseys in Tipton to share information and resources through our MOVES program.

MOVES helps connect Tulare County residents with local services, from Medi-Cal and vaccines to housing, mental health support, and more. Our team spent time visiting with dairy workers, sharing burritos, and talking about the program.

Introducing...



Dr. Kevin Cowan
Board-certified general surgeon

Kaweah Health is pleased to welcome Dr. Kevin Cowan, a general surgeon, to its medical staff.

Dr. Cowan joins Kaweah Health from Covenant Health Medical Group in Hobbs, New Mexico. However, his connection to Kaweah Health runs much deeper — he completed his general surgery residency here before spending time in New Mexico. Now, he returns to

Visalia to continue his surgical career and open his own practice beside Kyle Potts, MD.

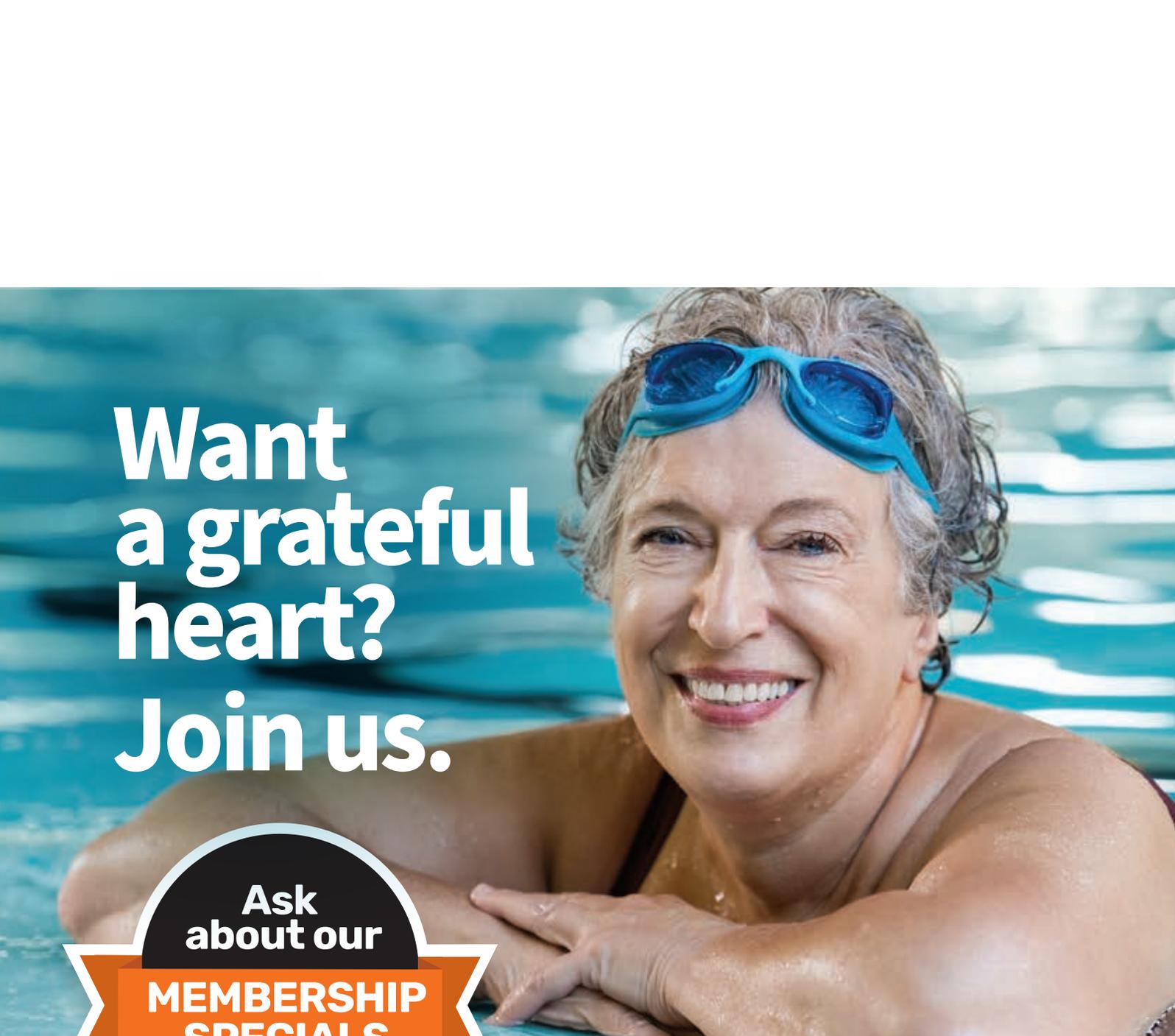
"Returning to Visalia was an easy choice because it truly feels like home," Dr. Cowan said. "My roots have always been in California's Central Valley, where I was born in Fresno and raised in Modesto. I was fortunate to complete my surgical training at my top-choice program here at Kaweah Health, immersing myself in the local community from the very start of my career."

"After several years in New Mexico, furthering my experience both as a surgeon and in hospital leadership, the chance to come back and open my own practice in Visalia felt like coming full circle. My wife, our two daughters, and I are grateful and proud to be part of this community we call home, and I look forward to serving Visalia for many years to come."

As a general surgeon, Dr. Cowan has broad training and experience across many types of surgery. Dr. Cowan's philosophy of care is rooted in compassion, precision, and partnership. Prevention, early detection, and patient education are central to his approach. By empowering patients with knowledge about their conditions and treatment options, he helps them make informed decisions and take an active role in their health journey.

"My goal is to ensure that every patient feels heard, supported, and confident in their care, from initial consultation through recovery and beyond," Dr. Cowan said.

To reach Dr. Cowan's office call (559) 738-0450.



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